

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 27 October, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Someone once asked me what my favorite Scripture passage was.

I answered that there were a bunch of them.

But she pressed me for one specific passage (turns out she was embroidering a plaque to give me as a gift), so I gave her the following passage.

I think I like it because it talks about TRUST, even in hard times.

It's from the Book of Sirach (one of those books that you find in the Catholic version of the Old Testament but not in the Protestant version).

For whatever it may be worth to you, here it is:

My son, if you aspire to serve the Lord,
prepare yourself for an ordeal.
Be sincere of heart, be steadfast,
and do not be alarmed when disaster comes.
Cling to him, do not leave him...
Whatever happens to you, accept it...
since gold is tested in the fire
and God's chosen ones in the furnace of humiliation.
Trust him, and he will uphold you.
Let us fall into the hands of the Lord,
not into the hands of men.
For as his majesty is,
so too is his mercy.

Sirach, Chapter 2

Best wishes in making your life the best it can be.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Friday, 1 November, is "All Saints' Day". For Catholics, it is a Holyday of Obligation.

The Mass Schedule is as follows:

0615 - WH5300

1205 - Chapel

1930 - Chapel

IS MARRIAGE IN YOUR FUTURE?

If you're planning a Catholic wedding in your near future, you'll need to have marriage instruction and preparation. Consider attending the next "Engaged Encounter" (16 and 17 November).
Contact the Chaplain's Office for information.

CATHOLIC CADET PRAYER BREAKFAST
will be held on Tuesday, 13 November, at the West Point Club at 0615. More details to follow.

DID YOU KNOW?

Since Thursday is Hallowe'en - followed by ALL SAINTS' DAY and ALL SOULS' DAY (1 and 2 November) - it seems a good time to look at this time of year and at these particular celebrations.

The fact that ALL SAINTS' DAY and ALL SOULS' DAY occur at this time of year is a confusing picture in a way. No one knows whether it's a coincidence or part of an early Christian desire to "sanctify" old pagan customs.

The history of Hallowe'en is definitely one of those old pagan customs (specifically a Celtic one), but it has a definite religious basis: namely, REMEMBRANCE OF THE DEAD.

The ancient Celts celebrated their New Year's Day on 1 November, the time of the autumnal equinox. It was the time when they reminded themselves that earth would soon enter its hibernation and would be ruled by cold and darkness until Spring. It was the perfect time to think about the reality of death, and the Celts spent the evening before 1 November honoring their god Samhain (pronounced "sow-en"). They believe that on that night, Samhain allowed the souls of the dead to return to their earthly homes. They also believed that souls which had been imprisoned in animals could be freed by means of gifts and sacrifices on that night.

They also believed that other-worldly spirits roamed the earth during that night, playing tricks on people, and that they could be bribed by gifts or fooled by dressing up and looking like them.

It's easy to see where our Hallowe'en customs come from (although the name itself - Hallowe'en - is a Christian word - from "All Hallows' Evening" - "hallows" was an Old English word which meant "saints") but it's a mistake to equate the whole thing with devil worship or satanic practices, because that's not what the ancients believed. For them, it was simply a time to honor their beloved dead.

The fact that ALL SAINTS' and ALL SOULS' DAYS occur at the same time is somewhat - but not entirely - coincidental. The early Christians were not always interested in stamping out pagan customs. Often, they simply "baptized" the customs; that means they continued the customs but gave them new meaning.

An example of this would be the custom in some places of having children dress up as Christian saints and heroes, rather than as ghosts and demons on Hallowe'en.

The Feast of ALL SAINTS was originally a springtime celebration of all those saints who didn't have their own feast-day in the Church calendar. It was transferred to the Autumn because it was easier to feed the great number of pilgrims who were in Rome and in other pilgrimage centers AFTER the harvest rather than in the Springtime before the planting.

The feast of ALL SOULS' is also an ancient one, and the original emphasis was "prayer for the departed souls who were not yet in heavenly bliss"; they were still being "purified" (this is where the idea of "purgatory" comes from).

Let's see: what did I leave out?

Jack-o-lanterns.

As a matter of fact, jack-o-lanterns didn't originally have anything to do with Hallowe'en. An old Irish legend tells the story of a man named Jack, who died and couldn't get into heaven or hell. No one wanted him.

So the devil threw Jack a lighted coal, which he put into a hollowed-out turnip. With this as a "lantern", Jack supposedly roams the earth until Judgement day, when his fate will be decided.

In England and Ireland, people still use turnips or large beets from which to carve jack-o-lanterns, but in the USA, we've substituted pumpkins. The Irish brought the custom to the USA, and it's been part of our culture ever since.

Another example of how "religion influences culture", which is pretty much the whole history of Hallowe'en.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS:

...cadets who are on Retreat this weekend.

...all our military brothers and sisters - and their families - throughout the world,
especially those in areas of risk.

GOT A QUESTION:

Q: Father, my roommate is Muslim, and she and I were having a discussion about our beliefs. I tend not to think of "God" and "Allah" as being the same. On the other hand, she does. I had never really thought about it before, but to me, the two were always separate. Could you please clarify.

A: Thanks for the question. It's an important one, especially today, when there's so much misunderstanding in the West about Islam.

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council issued a policy-statement called "Declaration on the Relationship of the Catholic Church to Non-Christian Religions". At the time, it was a very important statement because it reversed a lot of opinions about what the Catholic Church really believed, and it asked Catholics to eliminate any attitudes of bias or prejudice from their religious beliefs.

Part of that Declaration dealt with Islam, and I'd like to quote the whole passage for you and your roommate:

Upon the Muslims, too, the Church looks with esteem.
They adore One God, living and enduring, merciful and

all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men and women. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, his virgin mother; at times, they call on her too with devotion. In addition, they await the Day of Judgement when God will give each person his or her due after raising him and her up. Consequently, they prize the moral life and give worship to God, especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Although in the course of centuries, many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this Council urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all men and women, let everyone make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom.

Nostra Aetate #3

And to answer your question, the Christian "God" and the Muslim "Allah" are two names for the same Reality. If you were to do some research into the subject, you'd find that Christians, Muslims and Jews were always called "People of the Book". That meant that they drew many of their beliefs from the common traditions of what we Christians call "The Old Testament".

Abraham - whose story is told in the earliest pages of Genesis (beginning with Chapter 12) - is considered the father of the Jews AND the Arabs and consequently of the Jewish faith AND the Muslim faith.

And because the Christian "New Testament" is spiritually linked with the Old Testament, Christians consider Abraham their "faith in faith" as well.

So, Christians have a lot in common with the faith of Islam.

But you're right: most of the time, it never occurs to us that what we easily consider "differences" might not be differences at all.

And this is true with the terms "God" and "Allah"; they're simply two different terms for the same Reality - the One God, merciful and compassionate.

I hope this gives you two some thoughts to discuss.

Glad you asked the question.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

(Note: we continue the discussion of the Ten Commandments)

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT: "You shall not steal".

Exodus 20:15

Deuteronomy 5:19

The 7th Commandment forbids UNJUSTLY TAKING OR KEEPING the goods of one's neighbor and WRONGING him or her in any way with respect to those goods.

It commands JUSTICE and CHARITY in the CARE OF EARTHLY GOODS.

For the sake of the common good, it requires:

- a) RESPECT for the fact that God destined the earth for EVERYONE;
and also
- b) a HEALTHY UNDERSTANDING that there is room here for
a belief in PRIVATE PROPERTY.

Within the Catholic understanding of the 7th Commandment, there are several applications:

1) COMMON OWNERSHIP of the earth vis-a-vis PRIVATE PROPERTY:

The goods of this world are intended for the whole human race.

At the same time, the Church believes that these goods can be divided up and PRIVATELY "owned" by human beings to help each one meet his and her basic needs...

BUT private ownership does not do away with the fact that God intended the goods of the earth to be shared, and owners of private property have an obligation in JUSTICE to make that property fruitful and somehow share its benefits with all people.

2) RESPECT for persons and their goods:

In economic matters, God demands that we operate according to

- a) the virtue of TEMPERANCE (not getting attached to this world);
- b) the virtue of JUSTICE (giving our neighbor his and her DUE);
- c) the practice of SOLIDARITY ("Do unto others, etc...").

Practically speaking, this means that

- a) we cannot STEAL (unjustly take the property of another).

STEALING violates the dignity and respect that we owe to every human being.

This includes deliberately keeping things which have been borrowed or lost, business fraud, paying unjust wages, forcing up prices, tax evasion, excessive expenses and waste.

It also includes keeping economic promises and contracts, making reparations for injustices or cheating or fraud of any type.

It also includes not participating in any business arrangements which would lead to the ENSLAVEMENT of human beings.

- b) we must respect the INTEGRITY of creation.

This means respect for the earth and everything on it, whether animals, plants or minerals. We are STEWARDS of the earth, not its owners. Consequently, we have no right to MISUSE anything.

3) the Church's SOCIAL DOCTRINE:

The Catholic Church believes that it has the right to make moral judgements about economic and social matters. This is not "politics"; it is simply the Church fulfilling her mission to help orientate ALL human activity

toward God.

Basic SOCIAL "operating principles" of the Church are as follows:

- a) any system in which social relationships are determined entirely by ECONOMIC factors is contrary to human dignity;
- b) it is MORALLY UNACCEPTABLE to make "profit" the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity;
- c) to subordinate the basic rights of the individual to the COLLECTIVE organization of production is morally wrong;
- d) to subordinate human labor to the "law of the marketplace" is morally wrong;
- e) to make human beings into "means of profit" is morally wrong.

4) ECONOMIC ACTIVITY and SOCIAL JUSTICE:

The development of economic activity and growth in production are meant to provide for the needs of human beings. Economic life should be designed FIRST for the SERVICE of human beings and should be exercised in keeping with God's plan for the earth. This has several implications:

- a) HUMAN WORK should be a means of holiness and a way to animate the earth with Christ's spirit;
- b) everyone has the right of ECONOMIC INITIATIVE, as long as this leads to the COMMON GOOD;
- c) the principal task of the STATE is to guarantee individual freedom, private property, stable currency and efficient public services - so that those who work can enjoy the fruits of their labor;
- d) people in business are responsible for the ECONOMIC and ECOLOGICAL effects of their operations;
- e) DISCRIMINATION should be eliminated from the marketplace;
- f) to withhold a JUST WAGE is a grave injustice;
- g) workers have the RIGHT TO STRIKE under certain moral conditions that respect the prerogatives of the common good.

5) JUSTICE and SOLIDARITY among nations:

In place of abusive financial systems, questionable commercial relations among nations, and the arms race, the Church must help nations create a COMMON EFFORT to encourage moral, cultural and economic development and to re-define priorities. This attitude would emphasize the following Catholic social-justice beliefs:

- a) RICH NATIONS have a grave responsibility toward other nations, especially to those prevented from developing by tragic circumstances in their recent history.
- b) DIRECT AID to such nations is a temporary response, but what is needed is the REFORM of international economic institutions.

6) LOVE FOR THE POOR:

God blesses those who come to the aid of the poor. In this understanding, "poverty" refers not only to economic realities but also to cultural and

religious poverty. The Catholic Church preaches a "preferential" love for the poor of the world, remembering the words of Jesus:

"...insofar as you did NOT do it for the least
of my brothers, you didn't do it to Me."

Matthew 25:45

So in the Catholic tradition, the four simple words, "You shall not steal" contain a whole compendium of human activity and social responsibility.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"What people don't realize
is now much religion COSTS.
They think that FAITH is a big electric blanket,
when, of course, it is the CROSS.
It is MUCH harder to believe than not to believe.
Don't expect faith to clear things up for you.
It is TRUST, not certainty..."

Flannery O'Connor
American writer
(d. 1964)

And that's the way it is, a day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our time...

and YOU ARE THERE!!

That's all for now.
Have a good weekend, and know that you're always
in my prayers.

Woodie